

CEMETERIES IN DUXBURY, MASS.

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By Isabelle Freeman

Duxbury is a 21-square-mile Atlantic seacoast town, incorporated in 1637, it now has 7,000 inhabitants and boasts four municipal cemeteries.

Standish Cemetery, 1.44 acres, at the junction of Chestnut St. and Pilgrim By-Way, the first burial ground in Duxbury, as the second cemetery in Plymouth Colony. Laid out adjacent to Duxbury's First Meeting House, Standish Cemetery contains the graves of Capt. Myles Standish, John and Priscilla Alden, and many early settlers.

In the early days of New England the dead were silently laid to rest without prayers of any kind. The first known funeral sermon in this country was delivered in Duxbury in 1697 when Pastor Ichabod Wiswall officiated at the burial in Standish Cemetery of Capt. Jonathan Alden. The oldest memorial stone in Duxbury marks this grave. The date 1697 is still clear. The Captain was a son of John Alden who rose to fame because of his role in Longfellow's "Courtship of Myles Standish." John had a more valid claim to fame as the last surviving Mayflower passenger, dying in 1687.

Three-quarter-acre Dingley Cemetery in the north part of the town and one-acre Ashdod Cemetery in the west part of Duxbury, were built to accommodate early settlers in the days when roads were little better than Indian trails or cow paths, posing a problem for horse-drawn hearse and carriages. Both cemeteries were filled to capacity by 1890.

Mayflower Cemetery, with 35 developed acres and 30 acres awaiting development, is located on Tremont St. (Route 3A) adjacent to The First Parish Church, Unitarian, which was gathered in 1632 by Elder William Brewster, a Mayflower passenger. The church, classic in design, lends religious significance, even though persons of all denominations are buried in Mayflower Cemetery. The first grave in this cemetery was dug in 1787 for Stephen Russell.

Duxbury voters, aware of increasing population and realizing churches could not afford to maintain cemeteries, asked the town meeting to take action, and in 1893 a study committee was appointed. The following year Duxbury chose its first cemetery trustees, namely, Thomas Alden, William J. Alden, Jr., Lawrence Bradford, Elisha Peterson, and Samuel P. Soule. The said Elisha Peterson was a funeral director and the townspeople continued to avail themselves of his services until 1925.

Duxbury, like all old New England towns, had its quota of private tombs and backyard graves, but most of the unregulated burial spots were so long neglected they are scarcely more than legend now. The Ben Smith tomb, however, has been carefully preserved, partly due to the intervention of concerned relations and partly due to the tomb's location diagonally across the street from the church and Mayflower Cemetery. This tomb lot is bounded by the intersection of Tremont and Depot streets and by restricted woodland. This tomb is a prime example of the first burial in this town

which had long constituted an eye-sore.

Increasing maintenance costs encouraged the incumbent trustees to eliminate the 6-foot wide depressed paths which formerly separated all lots in the old section. These paths were graded and many were sectioned off into four grave lots. With the entire cemetery brought level, maximum work is accomplished with two 70" Locke Mowers and several Bunton trimmers. Two Lo Blowers have been added to remove the heavy fall of leaves from the native oak trees which predominate throughout the cemetery, although maples and evergreens add contrast and color. Three year-round employees and three or four seasonal laborers take care of the manual details.

Mayflower Cemetery has a street frontage 2/5ths miles long. Fortunately the old section lies directly across the street from woodland owned by the Duxbury Rural & Historical Society, for in accordance with the custom of earlier generations the first row of lots is separated from the highway only by a driveway too narrow to permit modern cars to pass thereon. The recently built section has an attractively planted "green belt" at the roadside, which has received considerable praise, especially as the cemetery is being extended towards a residential zone. Duxbury averages 75 burials a year.

Although Duxbury set aside a Veterans' section, only Civil War Veterans are buried there, as veterans of more recent wars have been interred in private lots in accordance with the wishes of their families.

The trustees and superintendent are alert to the burden present inflationary trends involve. Under Massachusetts law annual care fees, for lots not yet under perpetual care, are not available for direct expenditure by cemetery officials, but are paid to the general treasury as an offset towards amounts appropriated at town meeting. Increased interest income on perpetual care funds is infinitesimal compared to soaring maintenance costs and trust fund income will cover barely 31% of the total annual budget. The remaining 69% will be appropriated at town meeting, but after reduction by the offsetting income only 41% of the total budget will be raised by taxation on real estate. The contribution from taxes is obviously much greater in years when major equipment is purchased. To date the trustees have been reluctant to increase annual fees.

During Mr. Freeman's superintendency Duxbury has learned to appreciate well kept cemeteries and the townspeople have willingly assumed the necessary tax burden to prevent its four municipal cemeteries from reverting to the apathetic desuetude common to burial grounds at the turn of the century, and occasionally still found in small towns today.

Working without clerical assistance, Freeman has painstakingly card-indexed every grave in all cemeteries, including the exact inscription on all grave stones and monuments.

The superintendent is a member of the New England Cemetery Association, and of the Massachusetts Cemetery Association. His untiring efforts to improve Duxbury's cemeteries are warmly supported by the present elected, but unpaid, board of trustees, namely, Edward P. Hobart, chairman; Dr. J. Newton Shirley, secretary; Dr. Hermon C. Bumpus, Jr., Ernest W. Chandler, and Carl E. Johnson. (Note: Miss Freeman had this article pub-

represent such a deterrent to municipal and private construction had the adoption of regulatory burial laws been too long delayed.

Hand hammered epitaphs in New England cemeteries entrance tourists, and Duxbury boasts one monument which is remembered long after customary plaintive epitaphs are forgotten. Asenath, widow of Simeon Soule, died Feb. 25, 1865, and a century later one ponders what inspired the cryptic epitaph "The Chisel Can't Help Her Any."

With John Alden and Capt. Myles Standish buried in Duxbury it seems fitting that the present superintendent, Laurel Bradford Freeman, appointed in 1938, is a direct descendant of Mayflower passengers Gov. William Bradford and Richard Warren, and possibly other Pilgrims. His personal heritage has inspired his constant efforts to improve the cemeteries under his supervision.

Largely due to Freeman's recommendations, perpetual care trust funds, which numbered seven in 1887, have been increased and made mandatory for new lots. Families have been contacted and persuaded to increase earlier, inadequate funds. Perpetual care funds amounting to \$40,336, when Mr. Freeman took office, now amount to \$269,804.

The main entrance gates to Mayflower Cemetery were a gift from Mr. and Mrs. Ernest H. Bailey, who were both descendants of passengers in the Mayflower. The polished granite posts were erected in 1927 and open into the main avenue between the old and new sections of the cemetery. The Civil War Memorial Monument stands on the right. To the left stands the 1964 municipal memorial monument erected at a cost of \$3,000 and dedicated to the "Memory of the men and women of Duxbury who served in defense of our Country."

Duxbury's ancient hearse house still stands, but has been used only as a tool shed in recent years. Duxbury tries to modernize; in addition to almost yearly purchases of motorized equipment the town raised \$2,000 in 1926 for a new receiving vault and in 1964 erected a service building that cost \$14,538 exclusive of architect's fees. This Colonial style building houses the superintendent's office, a fire proof record vault, a colonial waiting room, and sanitary facilities, in addition to the service shop which extends into the basement.

A gift of \$2,000 received from Miss Lucy Hathaway in 1927 permitted the extension of the fence along Tremont St.

Tourists, attracted by ancient cemeteries, comment favorably on Duxbury's ornamental headstones as well as ten or more wrought iron lot fences of elaborate design still standing in Mayflower Cemetery. No attempt has been made to require the removal of fences, although mowing and raking is expedited by present day regulations prohibiting individual headstones and fenced lots. Owners are now permitted to erect one monument in the center of the lot and may install flush grave markers.

Recently elderly twin sisters, who owned a non-conforming sand-topped lot bounded by cement building block retaining walls, located within the shadow of the Civil War Memorial Monument, requested that after they were laid to rest their lot should be cleared, graded and grassed. Mr. Freeman had never requested this, but had tactfully suggested the advantages of uniformity, and his courtesy was eventually rewarded by the removal of conditions

A minute burial ground, located directly behind St. John's Episcopal Church on Washington St., is not municipally controlled, but is still available, under strict church regulations, for an extremely limited number of graves.